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## SOME RECENT ITALIAN PUBLICATIONS.

*Manzoni's I Promessi Sposi.* Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by M. LEVI. Silver, Burdett & Co. Pp. xxix (introd.), 290 (text), 293-329 (notes).

THIS masterpiece of the world's fiction as well as of modern Italian should have a place pre-empted in every course of Italian. It combines to an uncommon degree the indispensable qualities of a great historical novel of established rank. Apart from the charm of any work set in the framework formed by the most magnificent of north Italian scenery—the Lombard lake region—it is historically instructive because of the faithful picture it vividly presents us of the distressing conditions of life prevailing in north Italy under the Spanish domination of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. From the linguistic side the work is accepted by Italians as a model of their literary idiom, toward the fixing of which, by means of this contribution, the author took infinite pains. The literary workmanship displays pre-eminently in the author the virtues of good sense in tone and of a well-regulated imagination in execution, by means of which the requisite elements of fact and fiction are happily blended.

The book is inspired throughout by a spirit that constitutes its special claim to distinction, a spirit that can be imparted only by a rare personality like the author's his high-mindedness, his genial humor, his exquisite humanity. It is pervaded by a bracing moral tone making for the finest of Christian virtues—freedom from bitterness or rancor in the presence of adversity or persecution. It stands for belief in the supremacy of good over evil—not in the conception of the vulgar melodrama where the tribulated lovers must come together and the villains receive their dues; but in the highest sense of a moral obligation not weighted down in its operation by a tariff of terrestrial rewards and punishments for stimulating zeal in right-doing. It abounds with dramatic episodes, colored by a delicate moral touch, never obtrusive, and thus representing the highest expression of literary art. No more powerful and moving passages can be found in the range of literature than some of those in which the author follows the vicissitudes of his hero and heroine or of their persecutors, as, for example (chap. xxiii), the dramatic meeting between the saintly cardinal archbishop, Federigo Borromeo, and the dread *innominato*, where, like a *coup de théâtre*, we see the hitherto unconquerable robber baron disarmed by the holy man whose only weapons are words of peace and charity.

To hand down all these literary merits of Manzoni's novel in a practicable school edition is no easy matter. The obstacle is twofold, arising from the difficulty of the language and the length of the text. The book is not to be classed as an easy one for the foreign learner. In fact, it will soon dispel from the latter any notion, springing from a widespread heresy among some people who should know better, that Italian is a ridiculously easy language, to be picked up "fluently" in the customary six weeks or less charitably allowed by some of the patent language nostrums now in vogue for exploiting the credulity of the public. The language of *I Promessi Sposi* needs careful and pretty full annotation, in itself not an easy task. In the present edition this has been in the main acceptably done. This statement does not relieve us from saying that we think there are many definitions that are simple enough to warrant their having been left to the resources of the dictionary in accordance with the editor's avowed policy. Other terms are so difficult that the explanations should have been made fuller. Others again properly claim a place in the annotation, but

have been left out. Doubtless this is a diagnosis where doctors are almost inevitably bound to disagree. The introduction is very good.

The main difficulty in the undertaking lies rather in the question of abridgment of the text. The standard Italian editions vary from 500 pages (Le Monnier) to almost 600 (Hoepli), a measure quite beyond the limits of any school text that is to be encumbered with the bulk of editorial helps as well. Yet at this point wide divergences of opinion will appear, not to be entirely reconciled or satisfied. The editor has aimed to give the gist of the entire voluminous story in its original framework by condensing chapters here and there, and replacing the matter left out by brief summaries. Doubtless the results are as satisfactory as can be expected of such a process, when the matter that one critic excluded another might think ought to be left in, and *vice versa*. But even then, after this paring, we have a text of nearly 300 pages, a bulk which most teachers will find too much. There remains the unsatisfactoriness of the process in a work of such evenness throughout, from which hardly any excision can be made without a sense of disappointment and a feeling of vandalism. In such a case, where to reduce a work of such high uniform excellence means to mutilate it, we think a better plan is to give only a portion of it intact with all proper editorial helps in behalf of thorough study. With Manzoni's novel it happens that the first eight chapters (a little more than one-fifth of the total narrative) have a size and unity well adapted for this purpose, since they form a story complete in itself as far as it goes, the eighth chapter having a close that makes a suitable break in the narrative at that point. In this way the student will have a more satisfactory comprehension of the work as far as it goes. If at the end of this stage his literary qualities be of the kind and promise worth cultivating, he will have developed an incentive to finish the story—which he can do in some cheap one-lire edition—as independent sight reading for sense only, an exercise having a distinct value of its own and one that should be better cultivated in modern-language study.

*Goldoni's Il Vero Amico*. Edited, with Introduction, Notes, and Vocabulary, by J. GEDDES, JR., AND F. M. JOSSELYN. D. C. Heath & Co., 1902. Pp. i-xii + 1-87 (text), 89-118 (notes and vocab.).

THIS is one of the lesser plays of the eminent classic playwright of Italy, whose extreme fertility of dramatic productiveness was purchased at some expense of quality. Of the small number of his plays resting at the apex of his reputation upon the great bulk of his work, some of the best are in the Venetian dialect. Of those in the literary idiom upon whose unquestioned high merits criticism is pretty well united, two (*Un Curioso Accidente* and *La Locandiera*) have already appeared in Heath's Italian series. The present play is not up to its predecessors in literary quality, and is hardly to be classed with the first half-dozen of the author's best plays. When these are listed, Goldoni's repertoire is pretty well exhausted for practical purposes, and his due share of attention richly granted in our general literature courses.

In view of these facts, we are somewhat surprised at the choice of *Il Vero Amico* for publication. It has but a moderate amount of interest and very much less of originality. But on this last score the appreciative student of literature is obliged to make many allowances in the light of Goldoni's reverence and enthusiastic admiration for Molière and the latter's deep influence over him. This influence had a valuable effect in impelling Goldoni to institute a sweeping reform of the Italian